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Atlantis! Atlantis!

By

Sharda Deshmukh

1987

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
KULAPATI MUNSHI MARG
BOMBAY 400 007

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To
FRENS

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Sharda Deshmukh, an alumnus of the University of Bombay and a recipient of the K.T. Telang Gold Medal and Prize, taught Philosophy, Psychology and Logic to undergraduate and postgraduate students and was actively associated with different aspects of student life and higher education for more than twenty-five years. Now, for over a decade, she has been working as an executive in a shipping company.

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FOREWORD

In Greek legend Atlantis was a large island supposed to have once existed in the western sea just beyond the Pillars of Hercules. It is described by Plato as a Utopia with a high civilization until its destruction by an earthquake. He mentions it in two dialogues, the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. Solon (C. 640 - C. 558 B.C.), a Greek statesman and poet, was told of it by an Egyptian priest, who too said that it had been overwhelmed by an earthquake and sunk beneath the sea 9,000 years before his time. The question of its actual existence has provoked much speculation. It persisted throughout the Middle Ages and, since the Renaissance, it has been variously identified with the Americas, Scandinavia, the Canary Islands, and Palestine. Be that as it may, Atlantis has in some people's imagination come to symbolize an ideal State. The desire to locate and identify Atlantis is therefore the same as the longing in man to pursue excellence and perfection.

Just as all poetry is metaphor, all imagination imbued with the quest for a perfect state of being is a sort of extended metaphor — a metaphor signifying man's highest moral concern. In this sense it puts on the character and complexion of a veritable allegory. Mrs. Sharda Deshmukh's book shares all these characteristics. It has at

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once the fluidity and rarefaction of a beautiful dream and the vigour and throb of a compulsive fantasy. Being compounded of many simples it will not admit of any labelling as a distinct genre. It is best treated as a voyage of discovery — discovery of the self, not unlike that held as life's *summum bonum* by ancient Indian sages.

What lends distinction to Mrs. Deshmukh's book, however, is her unfailing grip on *terra firma*. It is a tribute to her literary virtuosity that she has brought about a successful blend of a soaring spirit and an ideational apparatus that clings fast to the realm of the possible — what has been and can therefore once again be. Consequently, she has avoided both abstruseness and obfuscation. Her book is not only enjoyable, it is also readable.

Finally a word on her command of the English language. The reader will be struck by the neatness of her expression and the trenchancy and pithiness of her narrative and descriptive prose. She has a gripping style that is at once disarming and unobtrusively persuasive. I am sure Mrs. Deshmukh's Atlantis! Atlantis! will help today's desperate and depressed man rediscover his inherent potential, his innate and infinite greatness.

Jaipur
15th August 1987

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Formerly Professor and Head,
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Part I

VENI

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VENI

(1)

On a dismal day last summer, I stopped as if in response to the unuttered cry of despair within me: Why go on? I do not know whether it was a protest against the journey or a recognition of its futility. I was more bored than ever before of the journey from which I got nothing, I sought nothing. It aroused no enthusiasm, impelled no adventure, induced no achievement — it led nowhere. It did not matter to me whether I went ahead or retreated or remained where I was. All moments and movements added up to naught. Why go on? — I said aloud.

And then suddenly I felt that I was on the threshold of what appeared to be a familiar but forgotten sight. In a flash I realized that it was the Valley of Wonders surrounded by the awe-inspiring ranges of the Miracle Mountains — the valley I had known years ago as a small child, the valley which had filled those faraway days with joy, with life. In the years that followed, the mountains and the valley had vanished from my mind, may be under the weight of facts and figures which I kept collecting. Strangely, at this moment of sudden discovery, I was not surprised by what I had found — it seemed so normal and

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natural. I was, however, surprised by what I was losing — the gnawing hopelessness and void that had been paralyzing me.

(2)

On entering the unexpected enchantment of the valley, there was nothing I desired more than reaching the highest peak of the Miracle Mountains. But the weather in the valley was uncertain with frequent rains and storms. And so I had to abandon the magnificent promise I had given to myself and be satisfied with more modest pursuits. Not that I am sorry. Far from it. During these long days of suspense and waiting, I moved for hours on end, observed the wooded valley and the mighty mountains and discovered Mir who made this sojourn the most memorable experience of my life.

Mir was the most sought-for guide in these parts and I was fortunate in finding him on the very first day. For Mir, climbing was as essential as breathing and telling stories as essential as climbing. He monopolized talking and did not allow interruption of any kind while telling stories. He talked of men with whom he had scaled the mountains, men who were the backbone of his trips and who had told him stories. He seemed to have an inexhaustible fund of these 'miracle' stories. For him, everything was miraculous — marvellous. That is why I called him Mir. And because I kept wondering he called me Won.

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(3)

Today as I look back and think of the wonderful stories he narrated and the beautiful verses he recited, I marvel at Mir's memory. Good listener that he was, stories and verses which he had heard, half-heard or overheard years ago, had come from him like freshly fallen snow and often as if he was their original author. I am sure he did not invent them; but I am not sure how far he understood them.

Did I? I do not know. Nevertheless, I am going to share with you these stories which he so enjoyed telling me — stories which constantly kept on transforming my ears into eyes! I will narrate them to you just as they were narrated to me, for, they were inscribed in my tape recorder over a piece of old music I had preserved for a long time. Soon after Mir started speaking and the recorder started playing, I noticed that instead of silence, chords of the old music often filled up Mir's brief pauses and that they were transfigured beyond all recognition! So I am also going to share with you these reactions and the experience that followed — priceless mementoes of the miraculous, my Fren!

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Part II

VIDI

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SPHERES

On a night torn by bitter cold and ferocious storm, a night when primordial forces seemed to rule for an eternity, I was alone in my cottage. Screaming winds, thundering skies, lashing torrents and trailing hailstorms terrified me. And then, suddenly the storm subsided and a full moon emerged on the scene and so did Mir. I greeted him with wild delight. He settled down comfortably near the fire-place and started telling me a story.

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The moon today reminds me, Won, of a dizzying expedition I can never forget. They all said things about the moon and the sun and the stars which appeared so strange to me that I thought I had lost all my bearings. I was surprised when Cop said one evening that the sun does not move, it is only the earth that moves.

I laughed at Mir's innocence. And I remembered the nomads who thought of the world as a tent. I wondered what adorable idea of the world was treasured by Mir.

For thirteen years, Cop, who was a monk and had lived a life of solitude, hesitated to say this lest charges of heresy be brought against him. It was only when he was about to breathe his last that his book was published and so he escaped the dreaded end. Well, that evening, when I pointed out to Cop the setting sun waving us good-bye, he only laughed and disappeared somewhere in the approaching darkness.

But I did not laugh. There was something strange, something so fresh in the quality of his voice and manner of speaking that I could not but listen to him with a matching freshness — with the unalloyed openness and wonder of a child.

One day, a friend of Cop told me that the moon revolves round the earth and that the earth is only one of the several bodies that move round the sun. The sun, which is a million times bigger than the earth, is only one star among billions that form a galaxy and there are bil-

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lions of galaxies in the universe. And, Won, all these move at a speed of hundreds or even thousands of miles an hour.

These moving bodies which had seemed to me somewhat unreal, now made me dizzy and I felt I was whirling in the depths of space around something. It was, Fren, as soon as the gyrations stopped that metamorphoses started which completely upset the insipid equilibrium of my life. Like spirits rebellious, the broken chords of my old music started doubting, demanding, questioning — even advising!

A few days later, I overheard a young friend of Cop's asking someone how all these swirling spheres have come about — this vast unending universe. And he was told that may be aeons ago, some particle had exploded and spread all over.

As I watched a mote expanding into a mountain and wondered what was more inconceivable, the nature of the spheres or their origin, the chords inquired: Where did the particle come from?

It was Kep who started the calculating game. He described and predicted the movements of these spheres and could calculate their speed. And since then, they have been calculating all the time. I had never been good at numbers, Won, and so I admired them absolutely for this marvellous ability.

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So did I. And as I wondered if such predictions could encompass man's life and whether such a life would be better than life in a world where nothing can be predicted, known or believed, the chords asked: Or would it be worse?

Gal had even made a toy through which he could see the faraway stars as if they were hanging on a tree in front of him.

While I thought of the achievement — and this was a new experience for me — of observing clearly the stars which were a million times further from us than the sun, the chords murmured: How did they make the toy? What made it possible?

He, however, was ridiculed and some people even said that his toys showed things that did not exist.

Were they also as deceptive as the eyes, of which they were extensions?

You know, once he had dropped two balls — one heavy and the other light — from the top of a tower declaring that the balls will reach the ground together. And they did. But many who saw this did not believe it. And I did not believe what I heard.

Had he seen it with his own eyes, would he have rejected, like them, what he saw? Why this distrust of the senses? Was it because he knew that by themselves they cannot give this knowledge; that by themselves they cannot even identify things? The chords suggested: Or, was it a distrust of what was new,

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what was unfamiliar?

Some day, I decided, I would try this out myself. But I felt certain that on reaching the ground — at different times — the balls would be smashed into tiny pebbles or particles of dust.

I smiled and asked myself as to a close confidant: Now, how could he be so sure? How did he know this — believe this?

Well, Gal too had explained all his ideas in a book and that turned out to be his undoing. He was arrested for they thought it was opposed to the scriptures. This reminds me, Won, of the story of a king who imposed death penalty on writing and actually killed those who disobeyed.

As I wondered what it was that compelled him to kill, the chords whispered: What was it that compelled them to write?

Hers too had made a toy similar to Gal's and night after night observed the heavens with its help. He had seen through it thousands of stars, even those the earthbound journey of whose light took more than a million years. A young friend of his told me that with the aid of these toys and calculations, more than a thousand million stars had been observed — giant stars and dwarf stars, bright ones and dim ones and stars of all colours.

Gone were the kings and the scribes and those calculating tools of contemplation! As Mir described the bewildering variety of stars, even the puzzling million years of speed vanished. And

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I was reminded of children, big and small, so charmed by the music of the Pied Piper that they just followed him. Gal's toy seemed to me, Fren, like a wonderful pipe which enabled him to lure the stars around him.

One day, Gal told me the story of Bru, who thought like Cop and expressed his ideas fearlessly and for this, Won, he was burnt at the stake. He could have secured his release by giving up truth as he saw it. But he preferred the stake to such cowardice.

Though I had amassed a lot of information, I had never really studied men. Now I realized how wrong I had been in thinking of them as mere chemical aggregates; how full of energy these men were, like the constantly moving heavenly bodies they were trying to understand and how difficult it should be to extinguish the fire within them.

The strangest of the group was New. One day, Won, he saw a fruit falling from a tree and this gave him the idea that the fruit and everything else was being pulled by a force all the time. It is this that controls the majestic sweep of the moon across the sky and around the earth as also the movement of the earth around the sun. As a matter of fact, New said that every particle of matter attracts every other.

I was surprised by these words which seemed to me spoken in a parrot-like manner. I wondered if he realized that this simple principle involved and implied great insight, imagina-

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tion and use of a suitable language to express what was understood. Not that I thought it was only a matter of words. But as if to convince me that it was not, the chords now seemed to pull me as they whispered: What is the nature of these particles?

New believed that light also is made of little particles. When these particles pass through prisms or even drops of water, pretty bands of colour are produced. This we have often seen. What surprised me, however, was what he added — that each person sees his own private rainbow and that each element has a spectrum of its own.

Was he saying, Fren, that when I see a rainbow, you need not? Or, that you see a different rainbow? Is the loveliest rainbow only in my vision? Do I create the rainbow — bring it into existence? Do I make a star when I see it? But for me, would they not exist? What do I give the rainbow and the stars and everything else — existence or meaning?

Well, New was ridiculed when he talked about the miraculous force. He was not perturbed. In fact, nothing ever upset him. One day a fire destroyed valuable papers on which he had worked for twenty long years. All that New said when he came to know about it was that he was obliged to work it all over again. And he did.

As a tug-of-war ensued between this total dedication to knowledge on the one hand and my past distrust of it on the other, I hardly listened to what Mir went on to say. I was dimly aware that he was approaching the end of the story, but I had

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an inexplicable feeling that it was the beginning!

Years later honours were showered upon New and he came to be looked upon as an ornament of the human race. However, when I once mentioned this, he shook his head and said that he seemed to have been only like a boy, playing on the seashore, finding a smoother pebble and a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before him.

The moon had merged into the clouds leaving behind a darkness that momentarily seemed to wipe out all existence. And then as I wondered if anyone else had seen the same moon and the same light that I had, I saw on a hazy horizon, prodigious sea-waves showering treasures of gems on an unusual shore. And it seemed to me, Fren, that a mysterious universe lay somewhere beyond those heaving waves, beyond the stationary sky, beyond the distant horizon.

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SPECKS

On an exceptionally clear day, we sat near a splashing waterfall — I do not know how long. It threw up sparkling spray of seven colours in mid-air before it reached the ground and turned into a boisterous stream. We were refreshing ourselves with the smell of wet earth and the sound of music on the rocks, when suddenly an ocean of low-hanging clouds eclipsed everything. A strange stillness hung in the air. It was difficult to say what hour of the day it was. I wanted to reach home before it became late. Mir made fun of me for being so concerned about time and started talking about Ein.

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Ein was an energetic old man with wild white hair and always humming a tune. I clearly remember the day I heard him telling someone that unlike people who thought that time and space would be left if everything else disappeared from the universe, he believed that even they would disappear with things.

As I wondered what would be left when even they disappeared, the chords asked: Where can they disappear? What is meant by disappearing?

One day a friend of Ein's told me: When you look at a distant star on a clear night, you are not seeing it at that moment. What you see is an event that had happened hundreds of years ago. Or, may be thousands! For, you are looking not only through space, but also backwards in time. For all you know, that star may have exploded and disappeared long ago.

Ignoring the feeling of being deceived, I thought of the miracle of the withered star and the withered time and questions surrounded me from all sides: If you can now see an event that had taken place thousands of years ago, should it not also be possible to see an event which will take place thousands of years hence? Can we see things which are not there? Can we know a future event unless it exists? And if it exists, can it be future?

I kept on staring at him. Confusion was getting more confounded. Ein, who had been listening to his friend

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said: Supposing you go on a space flight that takes fifty years according to earthly time and travel so fast that the journey takes only a month according to clocks on the spaceship, you will come back having aged by only a month while everyone on earth will have become fifty years older. If you were thirty when you started and had an infant son, when you come back your son will be twenty years older than you! Won, on hearing this, we both laughed till tears came to my eyes.

With the recollection of a description of time as the moving image of eternity, the upheaval caused by the questions had subsided and I had started watching with interest this eternal pilgrim. But now, Fren, as I too laughed, this beautiful image was transformed into a chameleon trying to move in all directions and it disturbed me for a long time!

Won, each explanation added to my confusion. While New had said that time is universally the same and flows from the past to the future, Ein believed that space and time go together, are equally fickle and depend on the relative motion of the observers.

I tried to imagine a world without time but miserably failed. Time seemed to be embedded deep down in my very being and that of the world. The chords asked rather patronizingly: What is this thing that you call time?

Well, people did not agree with Ein; could not understand him or the calculations which he made to explain

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his strange ideas.

Though he paused he said nothing more about the calculations. And I wondered if he knew that it was with this language of calculations that man had advanced far beyond the realm of the present and the perceptible; had been able to understand some of the secrets of the celestial spheres — of the universe.

Ein's companions wanted to know what stuff all things were made of — what the basic building bricks were. They talked about the smallest particle of a thing and its content. Won, how can there be anything in the smallest? If there is, can it be the smallest?

Taking a leap from the infinitely large to the infinitely small, I glanced at Mir with amused approval. No more was he repeating parrot-like what he had heard!

A few days later, Rut told me that there is, in the smallest, a big central thing surrounded by smaller things. He believed that the smallest contains millions of things just as the universe contains millions of stars. What a mysterious similarity! How large is the smallest, I once asked Rut. And he said that the smallest is to a golf-ball as a golf-ball is to the earth.

Stretching my vision to the utmost, I was so absorbed watching these dancing millions on the smallest stage in the world, that I was startled when the chords asked: Were they observed or assumed?

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One day, Fer told me that the centre of the particle when split, can produce a force which can be used as fuel and that it can also be used in warfare. A friend of his told me that this tiny piece of matter of which a million million million go to make a pinhead, holds as much energy as could be obtained by burning five thousand tons of coal. You see, great Ein had always said that these bits of matter were nothing but bundles of energy.

I marvelled at the incredible preservation and concentration of energy in these miniature sleeping volcanoes and wondered if man too was a similar continuum of latent energy and what would happen when it was released.

I once asked Ein if anyone had actually seen this force but he only whistled a beautiful tune.

Mir smiled. And I wondered if he knew that our knowledge of the smallest — and of many other things — was of a similarly indirect kind.

I felt that they were wasting a lot of time and energy over these things and often felt like just relying on plain commonsense. Ein, however, said that commonsense is based on what our senses tell us and everyone knows that by themselves, they can tell us very little, and what they do, is not always correct.

And then as I wondered if he realized that whatever they are able to tell us depends on our purposes and selection, the chords observed: And they keep on changing!

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One day Opp told me that this energy was no longer a matter of mere possibility; that a magic ball with this energy packed in it was actually hurled down from the sky killing thousands of human beings and other creatures in a jiffy. Won, can you understand why people want to kill each other?

I had been trying to understand these dynamic bricks and the attempts to know the truth about them. Now something crumbled within me and a sense of impending disaster captured me. Through the fog of death and destruction I saw a chasm created by the ball. And a man — a little mass of charred flesh, broken bones, scattered vitals and a decomposed brain noiselessly slipping deeper and deeper into the bottomless abyss! Was this the end of his hopes and dreams, of his ability and greatness — of the unique and marvellous universe that he was?

Won, those who were instrumental in making this toy which shook the world, were horrified by what they had helped to create. Ein and his friends made desperate efforts to ban the use of the toy; in fact, to ban all warfare, but in vain. I really can't understand why people want to kill each other.

My head reeling, my heart sinking and an ominous darkness blinding me, I faced a battery of questions: Why should men devour each other in utter disregard of life? Why should they allow themselves to be destroyed by their knowledge? Why should they kill and get killed, inspite of their horror and fear of death? Why should they become insane, inhuman, uncon-

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scious? Why should they succumb to the absurd? Why, Fren, why?

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LINKS

Late one afternoon, as we entered a forest in search of a lake we had not been able to find for a long time, we were welcomed by the trumpet-like song of an unknown bird, while the creeper winding a huge tree, gracefully invited us to the insect kingdom within the hollow trunk of the tree. And then suddenly, a tall tree dancing to the wild tune of the wind, revealed the vast expanse of the lake a little ahead, and, at the same instant a yellow butterfly flying away across the lake pointed to a hoard of monkeys on the other side. I was scared and started running. Mir laughed but he joined me. As soon as we were in my room, he started speaking.

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During a very lively expedition, delicate Dar showed me the picture of a creature which had the body of a gorilla and the head of Dar. You see, Dar believed that various forms of living things, including man, have arisen by gradual transformation of types that existed before. There is a struggle going on in nature; those who exhibit a variation likely to be serviceable in the struggle have an advantage over others; they tend to survive while their rivals are eliminated.

I was surprised by the confidence with which he spoke. And as I wondered whether man would survive the struggle, the chords which seemed to me like men who cannot walk without thinking of their legs at every step, asked: What causes the variation?

When Dar published his book he was attacked for it was thought that he contradicted the scriptures. However, Won, it brought about a miraculous revolution in man's thinking about himself and others.

Even before I could decide whether these were Mir's own words or give a thought to man's forbears, the impatient chords quipped: What does man think about himself? And others? I felt foolish, Fren, for I had never given a serious thought to this!

Won, has life come out of material things?

There had appeared before me a being with the body of Dar and the head of a gorilla! Though I was mystified, I tried to guess the age and the land it could have belonged to and I

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thought about variation and progress. I was awakened from this reverie by the exceptional softness with which Mir had just spoken. And then as I wondered if life had emerged from matter, the chords startled me with the alternative: Or, had matter emerged from life?

I had once heard someone compare life with a fountain continually thrusting upwards. Matter is the spent drops which fall back; it is life, but flowing in a contrary direction.

The fountain fascinated me and though I put into words the question that immediately faced me — how do the spent drops go upwards again? — at the back of my mind, an altogether different question seemed to be taking shape.

Well, Dar and Wal went on collecting whatever creatures, big or small, living or dead, they found on the mountains, while Fab sat with infinite patience, studying insects and their mental life. Won, he had recorded in ten big volumes his observations of fifty years.

As I wondered what it was that could enable anyone to devote an entire lifetime to watching insects — or stars — the question that suddenly crystallised in my mind was: Can life be produced in a lab?

Another man of patience was Mend. He had kept exact records of various features of thousands of plants which he had grown. Peas were his favourite. He juggled

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with tall and dwarf, yellow and green, round and wrinkled. He believed that he knew everything about them and what differentiated one from the other.

I was so overcome by the idea of creation of life in a lab that I took no notice of the mental lives of insects or the wrinkles on green peas.

Bur, the breeder, worked the miracle of producing a hundred varieties of a fruit on one tree. Once, Won, an earthquake in his town destroyed everything but nothing happened to his greenhouse. When I asked him about it, he said it was because of his communing with the forces of nature. He always took plants into confidence and assured them that he held their small lives in deepest regard and affection.

I was surprised. My wayward thoughts rushed back from these revered friends of Bur's to the charred flesh in the abyss!

Seeing my unbelieving face, Bur told me that he was certain they could understand him when he talked to them.

While I wondered if they had some special sense-organs, the chords asked very softly: Can there be no understanding without sense-organs?

This wizard of plants, Won, had given to the world more new plants than any other man before him. When he published a list of his new creations of fruits, flowers

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and vegetables, he was criticized and condemned for challenging the creator. He ignored all this for he was convinced that plants were as plastic in our hands as clay in the hands of the potter or colour on the artist's canvas.

I tried to capture these colours and forms in the inner kaleidoscope and while I observed their ever-changing patterns, there suddenly appeared something which had the semblance of a human being! I stopped. And I thought of a gardener of men, as loving and understanding and creative as Bur — a gardener who could transform them into something more beautiful!

Jag, who headed the group, was always surrounded by plants, lived with them and loved them. I was dumbfounded listening to his stories about the inner invisible activities of plants — how they were happy and sad, were intoxicated and irritated, how they wept and laughed, moved and lived. You see, Jag had found similarity in the responses of muscles, metals and plants and had observed their stresses and strains.

Though shocked, I now prepared myself to get acquainted with the joys and sorrows of metals!

Jag had even made a toy for recording the growth of plants during the short span of a single minute. When I asked him what he was after, he said that he wanted to unravel some of the baffling mysteries which surrounded life; that he wanted to see truth face to face. Then, Won, he picked up a flower and said:

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Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower — but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

I do not know what astonished me more, the nature of plants or the fact that Jag was able to know it!

He went on to say that he perceived in plants one phase of a pervading unity, a unity which bore within it everything — the mote that quivers in ripples of light, the teeming life upon our earth and the radiant stars above us. And he added that with this perception he was beginning to understand the significance of an ancient verse he had often heard.

He recited some verse so softly I could not hear it. But the tone of ecstasy in which he spoke, convinced me that in the consummate unity that he perceived, Jag must have experienced truth.

Most people don't believe in this unity or in those stresses and strains. Won, why should they find it so difficult to believe that non-living things have stresses and strains, have experiences similar to those of the living? Here on the mountains, snows and glaciers, winds and blizzards, rains and storms — all seem to be so full of them. And as for unity, Jag was never tired of saying:

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All things by immortal power
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star.

And I thought of infinite life-times that would be needed to locate invisible wires connecting stars in the heaven to flowers on our earth, unseen knots linking muscles and metals, unknown fulcrums moving spheres and specks. And I wondered whether it would ever be possible for anyone to know, to understand, the multifarious web of the universe. The overbearing chords quietly demanded: Why not?

People, of course, could not accept Jag. His ideas were misrepresented and obstacles to their acceptance were created inspite of his demonstrations. Later, however, treading on the same path, others tried to show that plants were extremely sensitive and responsive to all living things and to the movements of the earth and the moon and the stars; that they were living, breathing, communicating beings, radiating miraculous energy and power — power even to read our minds and our moods. And, Won, there are those who believe that plants can even be taught to speak, can even be educated!

For a split-second I remembered the time when I had doubted if even man can be educated! And then my thoughts darted back to that day in my childhood when I heard for the

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first time, the story of a million leafy lips constantly consuming what is poisonous for us and producing and distributing what is precious for us. And then came to my mind the day I thought they were illustrating and explaining the economy of nature. Now, Fren, it seemed to me that leaves and plants were singing the symphony of life — a sublime symphony played by a million musicians.

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ENEMIES

Next day I was resting at home because of a sprained leg. In the evening, as I opened my window, I saw a magnificent display of glowing colours high above on the rocky peaks and snow-clad towers and far below on the lush meadows. Enjoying this incredible affluence of colours, I felt thankful to the sprained leg; what I could see from the window that evening, I could not have done while on the move. Mir had gone over to our favourite spots. Not finding me there he came home. Noticing the small medicine-kit at my bedside, he started talking about the 'medi-men' with whom he had once scaled the mountains.

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One day tender-hearted Pas asked me, "Do you know why milk becomes sour and butter rancid?" Seeing me flustered, he told me that it was the work of his tiny 'friends'. This was even more confusing. Ree, however, told me that some of these 'friends' were in fact 'enemies' — small, very small creatures responsible for disease and death. I was non-plussed when he further told me that Pas cultivated these creatures and put them in the bodies of healthy persons to avoid disease. Won, can you allow the enemy to enter your house in order to avoid him?

For a moment, I too wondered whether what Pas did was proper. And then while I thought of kings and generals inviting enemy leaders to their camps to finish them, the chords commented: Isn't a thorn used to remove a thorn?

No wonder, people did not like Pas. But then, Won, he demonstrated that these 'enemies' could save thousands of men and animals who otherwise would be victims of terrible diseases and death. So, people had to accept him and his 'enemies'. Pas also demonstrated how these same creatures were at work in turning milk sour and butter rancid. I once asked him if he was not tired of the task of demonstrating again and again.

Ignoring the double-edged enemy of Pas and the double-edged energy of Ein they reminded me of, I wondered if it is possible, if it is necessary, to demonstrate everything.

Prompt came the reply, "I have a lasting provision of

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faith and fire." Of course he had. For him, the interval of night meant hours of waiting which always seemed to him too slow to pass. Well, I was amused when I found that, like Pas, Ree too was after a small fly responsible for a deadly disease and succeeded in getting rid of it. Is it not strange, Won, that many of these men were after flies and fleas? Won, have you ever heard this:

Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em.
Little fleas have lesser fleas and so ad infinitum.

I laughed. The skyscraper of big and small fleas reminded me of castles of cards we made as children, cards which were linked with great care and patience. And I wondered if any principle was being demonstrated by these invisible links.

Won, do you think these tiny creatures can really harm us? Are we so weak?

The links broke, the skyscraper crashed and in the debris I saw, like figures one sees in the clouds, a mighty elephant vanquished by a small mosquito hiding in its trunk!

I, for one, don't know what disease is and as for death, I used to think it leads to heaven and so it should not bother us. I am reminded, Won, of a verse I had once heard:

I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died as plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was man,
What should I fear? When was I less by dying?

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For a moment, Mir's love of verses surprised me. But the next moment I was myself chanting, "I died as man and I was" — and I stopped. That death was transitory, that it involved a gain and a growth seemed strange. And then thinking of Dar, from the runway of 'Man' I took off for 'Animal' and then 'Plant' and 'Mineral' and via a distant star, completed the journey. And I wondered whether 'Man' was a terminal or a take-off point!

Ba felt that diseases arise in man's mind — his moods and his feelings. He, therefore, did not attack diseases. He flooded men's bodies with beautiful vibrations from herbs and flowers which helped men to recover the desire to be well. In fact Ba insisted that there were no diseases; there were only sick people.

As the chords had been quiet for some time, I wondered if they were tired. Soon, however they surprised me by asking: In that case who is the enemy?

Old Ale talked of a green stuff. One day he found that the tiny enemies of Pas, which he had cultivated, were spoiled by a bit of this green stuff. This led him to guess that it could perhaps destroy the 'enemies'. Trying it on mice, to begin with, he succeeded in using this green stuff to save countless human lives. You know, it is on mice and similar creatures that they try all the time. And that too chained ones or dead ones. Won, don't you think mice and men are different?

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Of mice and men I stopped thinking after nodding in agreement. But they brought up from the inner vault, the memory of my good old lab, with rodents running in mazes, frog-legs floating in bottles of alcohol, wings of butterflies sleeping on pins and human tissues contemplating on slides!

I was shocked when I heard that some of these medimen even replaced the ailing organs of living men with organs of dead men!

As I observed Mir who looked as if he had already lost something, a touch-and-go thought crossed my mind: What would happen if men start exchanging good organs for better ones? Before I could understand why I felt alarmed, it vanished. And then as I wondered what the identity of a conglomoration of exchanged organs would be, the chords asked: On what does identity depend?

Won, the biggest surprise came when Char said that man has five bodies or five sheaths; there are five basic elements of which he is made and the world also is made of the same five elements.

The world appeared before me as a colossal jig-saw puzzle of innumerable pieces — the vast variety of things and men. And then while I observed the narrow boundaries miraculously disappearing and everything procuring a place under ever-widening shelters and finally resting under the enormous umbrella of the five elements, the chords asked pensively: Isn't there any wider habitat?

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Someone else, Won, said that the sheath around the physical body radiates energy and that photographs of these can give a clue to the disease a person may be suffering from, long before any other signs or symptoms appear.

I kept staring at Mir — was it to perceive some halo of energy? — till the chords suggested: Isn't energy the wider habitat encompassing the puzzle?

Par, the rebel, had no faith in the medi-men he was familiar with. He often said that they put medicines, of which they knew little, into bodies of which they knew nothing.

I laughed and I wondered if the medicines also could be made from the same five elements as the body.

Par, was full of new ideas about sick people. Ha and Sir found in some of them important clues to health and disease. These two, Won, always carried with them tiny bottles containing sweet little pills and claimed that these small balls were bundles of energy —

The chords butted in: Like the energy in the smallest particle?

— and were more effective than any other stuff of the old medi-men and could produce wonderful cures. Ha and Sir believed that more diluted they were, more potent and effective they became. At times, Won, they carried this so far that there was hardly any drug in their pills!

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The chords immediately asked: Isn't this also like the missing building blocks of Ein and his friends? And, Fren, the memory of the magic ball of energy came back to me with a bang, as also the realization that our lives are infused with energy — we tap it, pack it, process it, produce it!

I could not believe, Won, that because of them, old Ha was ostracized and when he published his main book a regular war was launched against him and his system. Many of his followers were persecuted and he was debarred from dispensing his medicines to anyone.

Which enemies were worse — those that damaged human bodies or those that destroyed the human spirit?

Sir also had to give up everything — his practice, his fortune, his future. He told me that for his convictions — for truth — he was prepared to face anything. It seemed strange to me that he made this sacrifice for the sake of those tiny pills. But Won, what had seemed stranger to me was that Ha and Sir were neither interested in any part of the human body which might be ailing, nor, in the tiny creatures that might have taken refuge in it. Ha once told me that he was interested in treating the patient, not the disease. He believed that disease is not a fixed entity but an ever-changing process like life itself. It is an abstraction!

Beyond the window the mountains had blended with the sky, their colours completely lost. And then as I thought of

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colour apart from coloured objects and of life apart from living things, I was intrigued by our capacity for performing abstractions, our ability for forging new ideas, our tact in drawing conclusions and our knack for observing, identifying, integrating, condensing, planning, foreseeing, anticipating and imagining. Can mice ever aspire to do this?

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WINGS

On a cold evening, we were returning from a grassy ridge. Though the sun had dived down the peaks, it was not yet dark. I was enjoying a few brief moments of twilight — magic moments which brought a peculiar peace this time between the day and the night. While I wished to hold it a little longer, it was gone and as if to make amends for this loss, the sky was now studded with glowing stars. And then I saw a fire in the distant darkness, a forest fire with wild flames flying from one end to the other! I looked at Mir. He was absolutely cool and collected and said: Do you know?

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Do you know, Won, during my toying expedition, in which everyone was bursting with energy, I heard for the first time the story of Pro, who brought to man fire from the gods?

For a moment I thought of fire, activity, aliveness and the difference their presence makes to everything. Then for some time all my thoughts were affected by the absence of one thing or another and the consequences that would follow!

I could not believe, Won, that he was punished and chained to a rock. When I heard Pro's story, I was reminded of this verse which I had heard on another trip:

It is with fire that blacksmiths iron subdue
Unto fair form, the image of their thought:
Nor without fire hath any artist wrought
Gold to its utmost purity of hue.
Nay, nor the unmatched phoenix lives anew,
Unless she burn.

As I thought of fire, the great alchemist, helping man to transform his thoughts and things and himself to become the envy of gods, it seemed to me that in the process, the conjurer transformed himself into different forms, each one of them finding a special niche within every man.

Anyway, Won, I met Ed, the genius, who seemed to me an heir of Pro. He had made more toys than anyone else and people thought he was mad. It was he who first

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made the simple lamp that has changed our lives. Can you believe, with these miraculous lamps, man was able to cast more light in a second than in the thousands of years that preceded? Ed had also made a disc on which he could collect the voices of people, thus making them immortal. And he had improved a friend's instrument that enabled two persons to speak with each other even when separated by thousands of miles.

Instead of trying to understand this defiance of darkness, distance and destruction and the enhancement of communication it achieved, I tried to imagine, Fren, a world without voices!

From early childhood, one ambition of Mar, the miracle postman, was to send messages without any covers or coils. And he did it with the help of waves. A toy at one end, sent out messages which were transformed by a toy at the other end. Won, do you think these amazing toys have minds?

Ignoring the disturbing question, I was about to picture the scenario of our lives without minds, when the ever-vigilant chords asked: Can you do it without the mind?

Mar was so modest that once, when a lady complimented him for his wonderful achievement, he only said, "It is not half so wonderful as our conversing together now".

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How right he was! Was not the ability to converse — to talk, to think, to understand, to know, to reach out to the hearts of men — the essence of man's relation to man? And without the warmth of this relationship, would not human life be as dark as those dark ages without lamps? The chords asked very gently: What is the essence of man?

Won, now there are toys with which it is possible to see minute things, to see hazy things. Ron had even found out rays which can pass through the human body, thus making possible direct knowledge of what is going on inside. So —

In my attempt to catch Mir's unspoken words it seemed to me that he was about to say, "So, no more of those fanciful guesses which had been man's substitutes for knowledge!" And I wondered if he realized that we still have to observe, select, record, interpret and explain what we see. The chords whispered: Can they not be dispensed with?

— Won, now there are toys which enable us to hear what is said from a distance, there are toys which can smell a thousand times better than the nose and those which feel more delicately than the skin.

Even as I started wondering what man would be without these reinforced buttresses of his senses, the chords asked in a strange voice: What would these toys and this world be without him? The answer — that the world of things, including these toys, has no meaning except what we attach to it, what we give

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to it — I found as shocking as it was clear.

Do you know, Won, to what extent man has enlarged and sharpened his senses with the help of these toys thus expanding the potential of his life? There are toys on which one can see things happening in different parts of the world, as if they are happening here and now.

The figure that crossed my mind was, I think, Mar's. And it was to him that I seemed to be saying: Isn't this a reversal? Sites and events now come to man rushing, thrusting themselves upon him and establishing instantaneous communication! The chords inquired: Does this increase the potential of his life or make life better?

And now, Won, they have made a master-toy — a real miracle — which can do thousands of counting and thinking operations in a second. And without making a mistake! It can answer difficult questions, can translate, can read several pages of a book in a minute and can even evaluate them.

With a little bit of envy for their minds and lives, I thought: So they can do whatever we can't? The chords, with a little bit of pride argued: Can they do what we can — whatever we can? Can they make these toys?

I was surprised to know that some people were afraid that one day we will become slaves of these mechanical slaves that serve us now.

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I could not share this fear; I could not consider men as slaves. And then, Fren, while I thought of men and the toys as fellow-conspirators trying to avenge Pro, helping each other and their capacity to know, I saw Pro rising from an erstwhile burning field, his chains falling off and the flames from the torch in his liberated hand reaching the sky.

I was even more surprised when a young man told me that with all this enlarging and magnifying, what we are able to perceive is but a minute fraction of what vibrationally affects us.

Some day, will not the remainder be perceived by one of those invisible bodies that we possess, and harnessed by some talented toy? And what miracles would follow when we start experiencing the whole? Isn't it funny, Fren, that instead of Mir, I was thinking of miracles?

Won, I forgot to tell you the story of brothers Wri who made a toy in which men could sit and fly in the air like birds. When they made the first toy, nobody took any interest in it, may be because the first flight lasted only twelve seconds.

I wondered, Fren, if he understood that the making of this toy that could raise itself into the air in full flight, by its own power, was the realization of one of man's most cherished dreams.

With these wings, Won, don't you think we can go to

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the top of the mountains without being at the mercy of the weather? And then will not climbing become superfluous?

I shook my head. Would there not always be men who will climb the mountains for the fun of it — for exploring unknown routes and reaching unscaled peaks? For enjoying infinite beauty, peace and solitude? For refreshing their spirits?

Well, since the first faltering flappings, these wings have been improved and now they fly faster and faster every day. Wri's friend told me that with the help of similar winged toys, men have reached the moon, and some day, may reach the stars too.

Looking away from the fading fire to the beaming sky it had left behind, I tried to gather my amorphous feelings about the miracle of a toy rising by its own power into the sky, far above our enchanting earth. But, the next moment my mind dashed back to that day in the misty past when the all-seeing eyes of Gal's toy had held out for the first time the promise of limitless vision. And then, Fren, with exuberant delight it forged into a future where men flew freely in infinite space!

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FLIGHT

One sunny, windless midafternoon, I was sitting in the verandah of my cottage. Down below, in the fields, men and women kept working monotonously, unmindful of the sizzling heat. And then, as if they were materialized from nowhere by some master-magician, troupes of clouds screened the fields, lightning spotlighted the artists, music of thunder filled the mystic silence of the valley, while ranges after ranges of ice-clad mountains held their heads high against the onslaught of snow. I was humming an old tune when Mir came, just in time to escape from the deluge of a freezing rain. He made me sing the song and then started the story.

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Your song is like the one Tag had composed and was singing wholeheartedly when I first saw him. Tag, with silver hair and a serene face was saying:

Where roads are made I lose my way.
In the wide water, in the blue sky
There is no line of a track.
The pathway is hidden by the birds'
Wings, by the star-fires, by the flowers
Of the wayfaring seasons.
And I ask my heart if its blood
Carries the wisdom of the unseen way.

For a moment it seemed to me that Mir had made a mistake — that Tag must have said 'where the roads are not made'. He had not and as Mir finished I wondered: If like flowers and birds and stars, men are allowed to grow without being restrained by any stale, misleading ruts — are allowed to be themselves — would they take the right steps from one self-determined goal to another, to fulfil themselves?

In this group, they were all always in raptures. Clouds would inspire Kal to write verses. Once, Won, he had written a long poem in which the rain reminded a banished hero of his beloved and so he entreated a passing cloud to carry to her the news of his welfare, assurance of his devotion and the promise of their union. So often Kal would fill the fields and the forests, the sky and the sea with feelings and describe them so movingly that we saw

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in them more than what our senses revealed to us.

Even I was getting much more from Mir's words than what my ears heard. I could experience the warmth of the fire within Kal and Tag and felt elated by their flights. The chords fluttered: What makes this miracle possible?

Handsome Shak would act and react. He would write verses and recite them, passages after passages of great beauty and charm. He would be happy and sad and would make us laugh and cry. Won, the funny thing about Shak was that he was inseparable from his stage. I particularly remember the evening he was in a dark mood and told us before retiring for the night:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.

But next morning Shak was a changed person. He woke me up chanting:

Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top.

As I stood watching the sunrise, I heard him telling Kal:

Who doth the world so gloriously behold
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnished gold?

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Dwindling candles and cloudy shadows, after a momentary appearance vanished from my magic stage and I wondered whether what took its place was a mountain that had turned into gold, or gold that had taken the shape of a mountain!

Now on this unforgettable morning Tag arrived saying,"I feel as if dim distant memories come to me of the time when I was one with the rest of the earth; when on me grew the green grass and on me fell the autumn light; when a warm scent of youth would rise from every pore of my vast, soft, green body at the touch of the rays of the mellow sun, and a fresh life, a sweet joy, would be half-unconsciously poured forth from all the immensity of my being. My feelings seem to be those of the ancient earth in the daily ecstasy of its sun-kissed life; my own consciousness seems to stream through each blade of grass, each sucking root, to rise with the sap through the trees, to break out with joyous thrills in the waving fields of corn, in the rustling palm-leaves".

I do not know whether vibrations were rising within me from the depths of the earth and spreading all over or whether they were coming from the sun and getting converted into my consciousness.

On another memorable day, Tag was doing Shak's portrait. Teacherlike he was asking Shak to keep still and to contemplate a puppet of his empire. You see, Shak had created an amazing number and variety of wonderful per-

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sons from out of his imagination. And Tag had started a school in an environment, where the mind of the young might expand into love of beauty and of God! Well, in-spite of Tag, Shak kept on reciting:

To thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

I had been struggling to capture and portray consciousness and in the process lost it — or so I thought. And now, as Mir's verse pushed me to the surface from this journey within, I became aware, Fren, of the miracle of being aware of myself and of the entire universe.

At this point Vin arrived and suggested to Tag that music should be played. He himself had done this during all the sittings while he painted the picture of a woman so that the rapt expression on her face might not fade away. Later, Won, I was told that it was a picture which held millions spell-bound. Well, after making the suggestion, he took a canvas and captured on it strange shapes of hills and rocks, plants and animals. Then he juggled with light and shade and the picture was totally transformed.

I felt a little frustrated. Music enabled him to capture a supremely beautiful expression and light enabled him to capture infinitely beautiful forms. Would nothing enable me to capture and portray consciousness? The chords asked gently: To capture that which is everpresent? To portray that which makes all

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portraying possible?

Vin had also decorated many temples and halls with marvellous pictures and statues which looked as if they were alive.

I too attempted to make frescoes and domes in my mind and the feeling that lingered on the edge of my consciousness was that I was seemingly within reach of understanding something great.

An amazing thing about Vin was that he was equally at ease in every field he chose and possessed the magic quality of changing whatever he touched into something great and beautiful. A fountain of energy, he undertook several things at the same time, for, he believed that just as a well-spent day gives joyful sleep, so a well-spent life gives joyful death.

As I thought about this theory of life and death, uttered in a matter-of-fact manner, the chords inquired: What is man's life? When is it well-spent? Is happiness its goal?

Ang, too was equally versatile. He had painted in a temple the story of creation and in the process, Won, had created hundreds of figures.

It was as though the cloud which barred the view of the sun had shifted, revealing it in its totality. I now grasped it — to name and to know which I had just been at a loss. If even in depicting the story of creation, Ang had to create, did it not

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show the immense need and possibility of creation for man? Like the frescoes and the domes and those toys, is not the world also constantly created by man to nurture his life and his happiness?

It took him several years to complete this and other masterpieces, some in stone also. You see, he had moulded figures which moved people from the depths of their beings. And surprisingly Won, at the fag end of his life, he started moulding words, as he had moulded marble.

I had thought of words as frail things with inherent limitations. Now, as I added them to the storehouse of the tools of creation, I wondered what strength, what power, what possibilities they must have.

Take this verse, which I enjoyed very much:

When that which is divine in us doth try
To shape a face, both brain and hand unite
To give, from a mere model frail and slight,
Life to the stone by Art's free energy.

Thinking of the power they possessed for focussing the mind, for attaining, retaining and accelerating knowledge, for communicating, for growing, I had started feeling that what moulded men were words. Now I wondered if like art, words possessed the power to give life.

You see, Won, Ang's secret was that whatever be the

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field, he had a burning desire for perfection.

The cosmic drama had ended and in the silence that followed, everything seemed to have stopped — even the raindrops trickling from the roof-top — except wheels within wheels of questions that faced me: Perfection? Is it not a miracle, Fren, that man should think of perfection? And, think of it as the goal of human life? And, try to achieve it, realize it?

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ENDS

The storm subsided, the fog vanished, and as the sun burst in through the fractured clouds strolling over scraps of clear blue sky, the air, the atmosphere — everything — suddenly sparkled. And then in a few brief moments, while we watched with awe and admiration the creation of pearls and diamonds on the wet leaves, the golden sunlight imperceptibly retreated and in their lingering light, cool currents of the evening air stroked us refreshingly. And as the stars hypnotized heaven and earth, the story-teller continued.

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Though Kel was in a different expedition, the group I just talked of always reminds me of her. When I first saw her, I doubted if she could climb, for, Won, she could not see and she could not hear. Soon, however, I found out that there was hardly a thing she had not mastered. She could row, she could swim, she could gallop on horseback and, Won, she could read and write.

Though I had started picturing her life in the absence of sight and hearing, I gave it up realizing how inaccurate it would be.

You see, Kel had lost her sight, speech and hearing when she was a year and a half and she had learnt to speak again when she was ten. The greatest day of her life was when she spoke the first sentence. About this miracle she once said, "It was not easy at first to fly, as the speech-wings were weak and broken and nothing was left save the impulse to fly. But that was something. Can one ever consent to creep when one feels the impulse to soar?"

As I thought of the first step — the difficult and the saving step — I was reminded of the first winged toy which had tried to rise into the sky, not by its own power, I now realized, but by that of the men who thought of it, who had a vision of it, who had the will and the courage to make it. Was it not, Fren, the same miraculous power, the same exalted impulse, which had enabled Kel's broken wings to soar higher and higher, tenaciously refusing to perish?

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Won, can you believe Kel had read and also written several books? She said, she was so fond of books, because, without getting tired or troubled like people, they gave her knowledge of things she could not see. And then they became the very substance and texture of her mind.

I was no longer surprised by the words Mir used and did not try to figure out whether they were his or his men's. Did it really matter? But the treasure of knowledge which the books perpetually presented to Kel — and which became part and parcel of her mind — baffled me, as did the fact they did not give it to all men. The chords chided: What do they want to know? Do they know what they want to know and what they should want to know?

One day when I praised Kel for her remarkable achievements, she told me that it was her teacher, who had unfolded and developed the little mass of possibilities that she was.

The question that immediately seized me was: Wasn't this awakening possible for all men? But the question that the chords quietly put before me was: Would it have been possible — this feat of excellence — without the magic touch of the teacher, the constantly conversing books and an indomitable urge to know, to rise, to soar?

I can never forget that evening when, as I talked about mountains and miracles, Kel said very quietly," I can't see the mountains, but they can see me; I can feel them, I

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know them in a very intimate way."

As I wondered if it was some other sense or some sheath Char had talked of, which enabled her to know, the chords asked mercilessly: What is knowledge? This irritated me. Don't we know what knowledge is? Can everything be defined? Need everything be defined? And then as if in answer to my questions, I saw a solemn congregation of sign-posts, each of them specifying its position and place and its distance from others! What an illustration, Fren, of the importance of definition in the adventure of life and ideas!

Magnificent Sco was the nucleus of the group. The speed with which he climbed put to shame all of us born climbers. I was shocked to hear, Won, about his astonishing expedition to the unexplored southern end of the earth, a sombre land of bitter cold, always covered with snow. Sco and his friends, after a shipwreck, had slogged over this vast wilderness of rough ice for days together. Ultimately, Won, when they reached the end, they found a flag planted by someone else!

I felt disappointed. But as I closed my eyes, I saw the void of wilderness converting into an ever-extending highway decorated by the flags of these striving wayfarers.

Won, the struggle back was even worse. They had to face not only stinging blasts, fierce blizzards and brutal crevasses in those mighty expanses of snow but also blisters, frostbite, sickness and starvation. They, however,

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persisted in collecting and carrying with them various specimens from the unknown land.

The spell cast by the irritating question broke and I blurted out: This was knowledge! The chords corrected: Thirst for knowledge!

Then came a day when the inclement weather made advancing difficult. They were imprisoned in their tents by a continuous blizzard and that was the end. During this last hour, Won, Sco wrote to a friend, "It would do your heart good, if you could hear us fill our tent with ringing songs of cheer."

This cruel joke of nature was turning my mind numb. But I was glad it could not strangle their songs and their search.

That, Won, is the spirit of adventure. It can work wonders. There is a magic about it which I have experienced all my life.

And I heard the spirit of adventure singing again and again: Strive, seek, find — but do not yield!

I was, therefore, taken aback one day, when someone asked Sco why at all he wanted to reach the snowy end of the earth!

Why he wanted to know — why he wanted to be a man? It seemed to me, Fren, that the cruelty of this question surpassed the cruelty of the joker who had tried to slash off his hands and feet!

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Sco, of course, ignored the question, looked at a distant peak and said:

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wonderous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

Through the icy pantomime I saw Sco standing on the tip of an iceberg, surrounded by an all-pervading frozenness. With his head held high, he was waving a flag, as if laying bare man's life and its potential, and he was smiling — a smile in the presence of which it would be impossible to doubt the value of adventure, knowledge, life. And I felt I was witnessing the miracle of man and his invincible spirit.

Lastly, Won, I must tell you the story of simple Sim. Sim had built beautiful, tall towers in his garden from sea-shells, broken tiles, pieces of glass — whatever throw-aways he could collect. Won, is it not unbelievable that he had worked on it single-handed for thirty-three years? And what is even more unbelievable, when the towers were completed he gave away his house, his garden and the marvellous towers to a neighbour and simply walked out.

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I was amazed. What was it that had prompted him to consecrate his life to these extraordinary towers and then in his hour of triumph and glory to abandon them? Were the towers a stepping-stone to something greater and higher than their visible form? What had he really built and achieved? And then as I wondered whether process was more important or product, effort more important or end, the chords asked: Are they not equally important? Can they really be separated?

One day, when I asked Sim, "Why, Sim, why?", simple Sim said, "I had in mind to do something big and I did".

The simple answer was moving. Does it not sum up the essence of man's life — to reach his own highest potential in his own way? And it seemed to me, Fren, that what Sim had really built bit by bit, was a road to reach himself and it had now become a polestar!

Later, Won, the authorities were afraid that the towers might be dangerous and thought of demolishing them. Fortunately, however, the test they conducted, proved these fears unfounded and so the towers were not destroyed.

In the darkness of the now starless night, I wondered if they had thought of destroying this great monument to man's spirit, because it was the work of just two hands and a single soul. And then while I felt that it was their thought that was dangerous, with its coating of doubt and distrust, with its

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capacity to kill the spirit of the towers, I saw, Fren, a white cloud rising from the ground. And it seemed to me that Sim was rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the towers and was building a peak — a man-made peak! — on the mountains, shooting up in the endless sky.

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GOOD

One afternoon, as we reached a high peak, from where it was possible to see everything around, we were surprised to hear the sound of flowing water. It was a river. Springing from a tiny source and expanding for a while, now disappearing naughtily, then growing gracefully, in a moment changing into a galloping waterfall, once again smoothly meandering through miles and miles of mountains and finally plunging — I imagined — into a surging sea. Listening to the secret murmurs of waters, I do not know how long I walked up and down the source before Mir started speaking.

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Won, do you know, you are walking up and down like Soc? I remember the evening when, with raised hands, he was telling the people who surrounded him that he was wiser than others because of his ignorance. He knew that he did not know and others did not know that they did not know.

I felt queer remembering those days when my friends and I thought that we know nothing and can know nothing and that nothing made sense!

On hearing this I laughed for a long time.

As I wondered if he knew that knowledge of one's ignorance was an achievement, was a mark of wisdom — particularly when each step taken towards knowledge indicated and expanded the vast realms of the unknown — the chords asked: Is it not also a great incentive?

Soc, who thought that the supreme business of life was to tend the soul, was always surrounded by men, young and old. He would go on asking them questions and as none of them would really know the answers, he himself would provide them. One question he often asked was: What is justice?

He seemed to me, Fren, like the chords, constantly asking me questions — questions which became part of me, awake or sleeping, conscious or otherwise.

He was absolutely serious about this business of

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asking questions to know the truth. He once told me that he pursued the trail of truth like a bloodhound. Won, can anyone know the truth merely by asking questions?

Did he think that questions were nothing more than mere sounds, mechanically made in the maze of our bodies — sounds that signified nothing, conveyed nothing, achieved nothing? Wasn't every piece of knowledge an answer to a question — may be an implied one? Often, was not asking the question as important as the answer? The chords, contrary to my expectation of blasting out in defiance, remained quiet.

I also remember the day when instead of asking questions, Soc seemed to be answering them. He was telling an old friend that if only men knew good, they would practise it. A little later I found him telling a young man that the obvious good of human life was happiness. Men miss it because they don't know what it is.

And then, Fren, I was surprised to find that anything — everything — that I thought of, had its basis in knowledge!

Soc was often ridiculed for saying all this and finally, Won, he was arrested and made to swallow a cup of poison which he did without hesitation.

It was shattering to face the fact, that men full of fire, who tried to reach — to know — the ends of the earth and beyond, were helpless against lesser men who tried not only to arrest their advance and clip their wings but even to choke their very life-breath.

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Won, one cannot talk of Soc without referring to Pla. They thought similarly and it is difficult to say who said what. The day I first saw Pla, he was saying, "A row of prisoners is sitting in a cave so chained that they look only in one direction. Behind them a fire is burning and between the fire and the prisoners is a raised platform along which passes a constant procession of moving things. The prisoners see, not the things, but their shadows cast by the fire upon the wall in front of them. Since, however, they can never turn their heads they do not know this. And so, they live in a world of shadows and think that to be the only reality."

Still in a state of shock I now felt suffocated and blinded by a thick screen of shadowy cobwebs. And then, Fren, my frantic attempts to clear them up, let loose the questions churning in my mind: What did the prisoners do? Did they break the chains? Did they ignore them? Or, did they think that the chains were just a figment of imagination? The chords, however, suprised me by asking very calmly: Were they aware of the chains?

Most of the time Pla talked of an ideal state, a just state, a state where children would be given the best of education and people would be governed by men whose sole interest was perpetuation of justice and happiness. He believed that all men have a vocation in life and when that vocation is fulfilled justice is realized. Well, Won, for saying all this, he was sold as a slave by the ruler.

Before Mir's last words could be registered in my mind, I

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saw Pla joining the bunch of prisoners in the cave! And then as I wondered if knowledge was a crime, justice a mirage and life a mere shadow, Pla and the rest of them disappeared. Only the chains remained and I heard them saying: If it is preposterous that the creator of a paradise should become a prisoner, is it not monstrous that a man should be bought and sold like chattel — like us?

Con too had a passion for just governments and superior men who might establish just governments. When I asked him what the existing governments were like, he told me the story of a tiger. Once, when he was passing through a mountain, he met a woman who was weeping and wailing by the side of a grave. Her son was killed there by a tiger, and so were his father and father's father earlier. When he asked her why she did not leave so destructive a spot, she said because it was not plagued by any oppressive government.

I laughed and there appeared a desert of gigantic pyramids, the apexes of which were adorned by statues occupying ornamental chairs — statues controlling the mobs below by doling out crumbs, the quantity of which they tried to compute in terms of needs. The faceless mobs looked only downwards, pushing and pulling, to collect the crumbs — their own and if possible others' too — utterly oblivious of everything, even the tigers that had gathered from the farthest forest in search of prey. Was the cement that bound these men together the feeling that they were mere insignificant stones existing for the pyra-

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mid? And did the statues feel that in turning these mobs into sacrificial animals — or bonfires of their amusement — they were distributing justice?

Who is the superior man? — I asked him later. He immediately said that love and wisdom were the heart and soul of the superior man. What the superior man sought was in himself; what the small man sought was in others.

That there was a difference I did not doubt; what it was, I did not quite know. I wondered if the superior man was one who sought justice. And then I thought of the mobs in the desert. What had they been seeking? Some of them had appeared to be efficient; some even generous — allowing a few of their crumbs to be grabbed by others. Some of them had looked loyal to the pyramid and the statues. But none of them seemed to be seeking anything. Why did they not feel any thirst in this desertland of pyramids, nor any hunger beyond the craving for these wretched crumbs? How could they survive without raising their heads, seeking something — anything?

Con believed that in a just state there would be men of character who would seek harmony of mutual understanding and cultivate universal peace. All men would have their rights and all women their individuality. Robbers and traitors would be eradicated. He called this the state of Great Harmony.

And I wondered by what magic, the dreary desert sands,

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with morbid mobs, could be changed into this state of Great Harmony.

Con's friends told me stories of his wisdom and the miracles he performed. Con, however, always insisted that he was only an insatiable student and an unwearied teacher. You see, Won, teaching was his original profession. In his youth, he had established a school of young, inquiring spirits who wished to be instructed in the principles of right conduct and government.

I wondered if these two contained the key to the magic transformation I was thinking of.

He gave up teaching because he believed that learning had to be taken out from its hoarding place so that it could penetrate actual living.

Far in the distance, I saw a strange storm invading a city, a storm wiping away ivory towers in the air and hidden graveyards below. As it subsided, what remained was a pair of beautiful hands. And I felt they had the power to build, to create, Civitas Dei.

Con, therefore, wanted to put into practice all his ideas — wanted to govern. And, Won, he did succeed for a while. But he was compelled to give it up because of the jealousy of other men. And so he wandered from town to town, trying to help suffering men with his wisdom which he had summed up in the rule: What you would not have

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others do unto yourself, do not unto others.

As I walked on more briskly as if guarding the river, the sentinel in me could not understand why men do not follow the simple rule — why they have double standards. And then from that high point as I turned my eyes in different directions, I felt something was amiss; an unusual silence and stillness seemed to envelop everything. It appeared, Fren, that the river had momentarily stopped flowing! Was it to awaken the sentinel and warn him that something had gone wrong somewhere? That it was time for checking and inspecting? Time for taking stock of things — everything?

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CHAINS

Next day, in the cold afternoon, as we were about to cross a fragile bridge, I heard an unfamiliar thud followed by a crushing, grinding noise filling up the entire valley. Mir pointed his finger to a white mass — an avalanche — which was hurtling down the ice-cliff with alarming force while the broken, powdered ice was whisked away by the screaming wind — I know not where. For a moment I was awed by its strange beauty but the next moment I was seized by a deadly fear. I do not know how long we stood there in silence. When Mir was satisfied that it was all over, he started speaking.

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Once we all had a narrow escape from a similar avalanche. At that near-disastrous moment lanky Lin, an excellent speaker, was saying "... that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion ... that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom..."

I thought of birth — and death — of freedom and everything seemed strange and confusing. Is man born free — and later finds himself in chains? Why has freedom to die? Why has man to die to be free? The chords asked slowly: When is man free? When there are no restraints? When he can act as he thinks? When he can think as he wants?

His words and his voice, Won, held me spellbound. You see, he was a leader of his people and had fought against slavery. The war which followed had claimed half a million lives and threatened to divide the country. To maintain its unity, he had told his people, "Let us discard all this quibbling about ... this race and that race and the other race being inferior ... Let us ... unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal."

I was perplexed. Are men equal — born equal? If not, can they become equal? And then as I tried to think of men who are equal but not free and men who are free but not equal, the disciplined chords inquired: Is one really possible without the other?

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This remarkable man who had started as a rail-pile worker and had developed into a matchless leader, was often vilified and mocked. But he was not disturbed. Since childhood, the only thing that ever irritated him was, when anyone talked to him in a way he could not understand. That is why he had a passion for putting all his ideas in such clear and plain language that even a child could understand.

While I asked: Were not our thoughts often enclosed in vague, inaccurate and contradictory language?, the chords inquired: At times are they not shrouded in forests of confusing verbiage intended to conceal non-existent profundity?

Lin could tell interesting and humourous stories. In fact, he was called a walking, stalking library of stories. One day while he was narrating one, I happened to hear him say of something that it was "as thin as the soup that was made by boiling the shadow of a pigeon that had starved to death!"

Mir laughed. I could not. If, as I had thought, man's lije was as deep and as real as the freedom he enjoyed, was it not clear, Fren, that it was only a shadow of life that he lived because it had to survive on a shadow of freedom? The chords asked rather sharply: Why does man want freedom? Freedom from what? Freedom for what?

Well, the war ended, victory came and he was happy.

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I was still asking myself: Can chains and man co-exist? Is not negation of freedom negation of all that makes man's life worthwhile? What would man's life be without freedom? As if in answer to this, there appeared masses of numbered men huddled together in slushy little prison cells. Glued to the ground. Deprived of upright posture. Maimed cripples whose attempts to crawl resulted in slinging mud and curses at each other!

That same night, Won, while he was relaxing and thinking of binding the nation's wounds, he became the target of a lunatic's gun which brought to an abrupt end all those visions and dreams of the tall lanky man described by a friend as:

> A man that matched the mountains, and compelled
> The stars to look our way and honour us.

In the smothering atmosphere, I encountered questions from all sides: Destruction of a man who matched the mountains? What did they want from it? How do they value a man? Suddenly there was silence and then there followed a fresh caravan of questions: Was this not an act of a free man? Was it an outburst of insanity? If so, was it not demonstrating inequality? There was an uncomfortable pause and then: Does it mean that groups, which are abstractions, may be — can be — equal but individuals are not and cannot be?

Then, Won, there was Gan — small and frail, scantily dressed and always smiling his toothless smile. He too

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fought for freedom and justice, and without weapons. He believed that the roots of violence, which breeds violence, are in the human emotions — in the human mind. He, therefore, told his men that the enemy is to be won with patience, sympathy and love.

If the origin of earthquakes that rock human lives, lies in the hearts and minds of men — in millions and billions of centres — how could it ever be possible to have peace? The chords retorted: Don't the counteracting forces also have their origin in these millions and billions of centres having the capacity to change and renew themselves and one another?

Their battles, he told them, would be won by the number of enemies in whom they could kill the desire to kill.

I had been searching for the source of violence and consequent human suffering in lust for power, greed for possessions, anticipated pleasure in seeing others crawl and collapse. Now, as I wondered if this remedy — to kill in the enemies the desire to kill and the faith in human nature it implied — was not rather visionary, the chords questioned somewhat violently: Can't desires be killed, canalized, disciplined? How else does man grow? Is the desire to kill the essence of human nature? What is human nature?

Gan often said that he tried to cultivate in his soldiers the courage of dying without killing. That is why he wanted an army of supermen. I vividly remember the morning he said:

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With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay,
Till their rage has died away.

Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number —
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep has fallen on you —

Was it not implied, Fren, that the soldiers had first to destroy in themselves the desire to kill, before they could have the courage to die without killing? And was it not implied, that once they developed the superhuman courage, it would enable them to relinquish — and rise above — the earthly chains?

Won, this frail man, who was a friend of the poorest and the lowliest and the lost, always tried to practise what he preached — what he believed in.

I could not help comparing Gan and his followers. And then as I tried to visualize the differences erased, terror struck me, for, I saw before me those undifferentiated masses of numbered, crawling men clinging to the prison cells stripped of all differences and waiting for the added equality of death!

No wonder millions adored him. But can you believe, there were occasions when stones and bricks were hurled at him? He was jailed again and again. And ultimately, Won, he too became the victim of a madman's bullet.

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While a scream stifled in my throat, behind the ghastly arena, I saw the corridor of time — swords dangling at every turn and bullets charging from every corner. And then as I wondered what restraints — chains? — should be attached to any man's freedom so that he may not abuse freedom, destroy freedom, the chords observed: So that he may really experience freedom!

Won, I had once heard someone ask Gan what his main goal in life was. Out came the reply: Truth! I have heard it said that love of truth is the beginning and the end of wisdom. Be that as it may, I think, I now know what it is.

I stared at Mir, surprised by the confidence with which he spoke. And I wondered if it was the same single 'villain' called truth, which all of them were trying to chase!

Gan's friend Kin was a young leader of his people, who were oppressed and ill-treated. And so he fought their battle of liberation —

Was freedom too an ever-defying, ever-disappearing 'villain' they were trying to 'capture' whole and unharmed?

— battle of justice and equality. Like Gan he too believed in fighting without violent weapons, to attain his goal. He would often look at the mountains and say, "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted.... the rough places will be made plain and the crooked places

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will be made straight. With this faith —

I thought of different bands of dreamers, those who toyed with their dreams and those who lived them; those who nurtured their dreams and those who laid down their lives to make them real, and of their imperishable faith in themselves. What was greater — the dream or the faith? The chords asked: Or, the dreamer?

— we will be able to hew out of the mountains of despair the stone of love. With this faith, we will be able to work together, stand up for freedom together."

I stood up. I saw the mountains and the valley standing together but not for freedom. Freedom can have no meaning for them. What about man — constantly struggling either to become free or to remain free? For man, was freedom anything more than the solace of an illusion?

One day Kin was very uneasy. He told me that although slaves were freed, slavery still persisted.

I tried to resolve the contradiction. If freedom was an illusion — was unreal — the slaves could not have been really freed. But the chords surprised me by asking: What is slavery? Where is slavery? Is it not possible that slavery is an illusion?

And he added:

They set the slave free, striking off the chain..
Then he was as much of a slave as ever.

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He was still chained to servility,
He was still manacled to indolence and sloth,
He was still bound by fear and superstition,
By ignorance, suspicion and savagery ...
His slavery was not in the chains,
But in himself.

In a flash I saw Pla's cave with its prisoners and chains, fire and shadows. Was man, after all, just a congenital slave, born with chains? Destined to live with them and die with them? Could not fire — which merely cast shadows — be geared to destroy the chains?

This fiery man was often abused, stoned, stabbed and arrested. And ultimately, Won, he too became the victim of a lunatic's gun!

Even as I screamed why?, I remembered Mar. Was there no other way in which men could converse — communicate — except with bullets? Was no other bond possible between men except what the chains create? But then, if "his slavery was not in the chains, but in himself", it seemed to me that there has to be something within him that could destroy it and retrieve his freedom and his flight. And then once again, Fren, I saw a future — I had seen that cold evening as Mir completed the story of wings — where men flew freely in infinite space!

Won, I once asked Kin if he had ever felt frustrated. He quickly said, "If I can help somebody as I pass along, If I can cheer somebody with a word or a song, If I can show

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somebody he's travelling wrong, then my living will not be in vain."

Through the long hours of that night, between brief breaks of disturbed sleep and dissolved dreams, the questions that kept returning to me were: What do you live for? For others? Their pleasure? Their freedom? Can you really live for others? Help others? What happens when your help is not needed? Would your life become meaningless? Or, would there still be something to live for?

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PEACE

One evening, walking on a forsaken path almost concealed by thick foliage, we arrived at a cross-roads. Standing under a tree, we were still thinking of the next step when the peaks were suddenly enveloped by thick clouds and so were we. And now as they changed into rain and a high wind blew violently, we had no alternative but to remain where we were, under the tree. I looked at Mir — he knew — for a story. He said he would start one but it was long and may have to be left incomplete.

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Won, it was under a tree that gentle Bud sat cross-legged for several days. You see, he was a prince who had been kept away from things that might mar his happiness — disease, decay, death. But this barrier could not last long. One day, while he was taking a ride in his carriage, he came face to face with misery and suffering — a beggar covered with loathsome sores, an aged man bent and broken and a corpse, swollen, discoloured and rotting.

Through a fog of sadness that enveloped me I saw the shocked prince — his face reflecting the torture he had witnessed and lived through in that moment — imploring the driver to turn the carriage away from the chain of decay. And that face, Fren, stayed with me for a long time as a symbol of man's suffering.

Bud was terrified. But now he was determined to know the truth about suffering, about life. One night, therefore, he left his wife and child and the royal palace in search of truth. It was, Won, during this quest that he remained under the tree for several days meditating.

I had expected Mir to ask me if truth can be attained by meditation, but he did not. And I wanted to ask him if chains can be broken by meditation, but I could not. The chords, however, asked without hesitation: Why not?

Finally, one day, he found what he was seeking. He realized that suffering resulted from not knowing the real nature of things, which are ever-changing. Bud talked of

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an eight-fold path by means of which one can rise above suffering. He preached a gospel of peace and moderation. He was really an embodiment of peace. A friend of his always asked us to observe his tranquil glance — his peaceful and complete personality.

Though the thought of peace — whatever be the path — was soothing, I was uneasy. Is the real nature of things unknowable? Is everything changing all the time? Can change be understood without permanence?

I had heard, Won, stories of his incredible achievements and boundless love and compassion for everything — birds and beasts and insects and men. One day when I asked him what the secret of living a peaceful life was, he said:

As the bee — injuring not
The flower, its colour, or scent —
Flies away, taking the nectar;
So let the wise man dwell upon the earth.

I closed my eyes and saw a bee coming near and flying away, repeating the feat again and again. Did the wise bee know the secret of life and happiness? Was she trying to reveal the panacea for our battles and bickerings, our shackles and sufferings? Or, was she trying to remind us that our business too was flying?

Bud never went back to the palace. He remained

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away because he wanted to help others cross the stream which he himself had crossed.

As I thought of the nature of crossing and those who crossed, I saw once again, on a hazy horizon, prodigious waves showering treasures of gems on an unusual shore I had seen that stormy night after listening to New's story.

Like Bud, Je was an embodiment of tenderness, compassion and love. While telling homely stories, he repeated again and again, "Love everybody. Even your enemies. If they slap you on one cheek, offer them the other too."

A toothless smile flashed before my eyes. And I wondered whether love would kill the desire to slap back or whether love would be born when the desire to slap is killed.

I was puzzled. One of his friends said:

For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting, bow them down with zeal;
...
....the truly noble know all men are one,
And return with gladness good for evil done.

My mind was in a turmoil. What was giving and getting? When is one rewarded or punished? Does the greatness of the truly noble consist only in returning good for evil? And if it does, would it not mean that they needed evil? If there were no beggars, where would charity be? If there were no weak per-

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sons, how would the strong show their strength?

One day, Won, when I asked Je what one should do with those who went astray, he immediately said: "Pity them for their ignorance and teach them that they may know. Bless them that curse you. Heal like a kindly physician those who suffer from an evil heart, even if in the delirium of their sickness they strike you down when you try to help them".

As I blurted out, "Good — pure and simple!", I felt that this counsel contained the forewarning of a forthcoming flood!

Forgive we must, Won, — sometimes. But can we love and forgive indiscriminately and all the time?

A flood of questions besieged me. In thus healing, are you really helping? Can you heal and help, once you are destroyed? What good is achieved by self-destruction? Need good always be of others? I would have been drowned in this flood but for the chords who intervened and asked: Are you and others fundamentally different?

Won, don't you think, enemies will then destory you? Do you know what happened to Je? He had miraculously healed his people and had taught them to uplift their lives. But they forgot his teachings, his healings and his love. He was rejected by his townsmen, deserted by his friends, arrested by his enemies. Finally Won, he was crowned with thorns, smitten on both cheeks and nailed on a

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wooden cross.

Even as I exclaimed, "Evil, pure and simple!", I saw a mammoth procession of men, each man carrying a cross on his back and, Fren, I felt totally exhausted!

This reminds me of gentle Mee in the group. Mee would sing while climbing and her climb was always a dance. She always carried with her cymbals to support her songs — melodies soothing to the ear and the heart. And she danced as if in a trance. You see, she was a queen in search of her lord.

I suddenly remembered the afternoon we had watched the changing moods of the river while flowing from the source to the sea. And I thought of Mee's dance as the return journey of the river!

In search of him, she had left her husband, her home, her family. She sang all the time in his praise, entreating him to grace her, to make her his constant companion. She talked of — thought of — him alone. Nothing mattered to her except that she had to find him.

The river would not leave me. It was clear that only single-minded determination and devotion could accomplish the uphill task.

Won, few understood her and not many seemed to appreciate her. Not even her husband. After his death, his brother who became the ruler, tried to torture her in diffe-

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rent ways — presenting her with a basket of serpents, a cup of poison and a bed of nails which were miraculously transformed into the image of her lord, a cup of nectar, and a bed of roses.

What defied my comprehension more than the transformation of these things was the torturing of Mee. How did her devotion, dedication and singular search affect the torturer — affect what he was seeking? The chords inquired: What was he seeking? Was he seeking anything worthwhile?

Mee sang her experiences and danced those ecstatic dances before the image of her lord day after day and night after night, throughout her life, to the tune of a flute she heard so well. Some people thought of her as a divine minstrel. Others said that she was like a moth that burnt itself in the candle of her love for her lord. What would you say, Won?

As the pageant of rain and wind ended, a solitary star appeared in the still undarkened sky. In the peace that now descended over the departing day, while we started moving away from the tree, I suddenly became aware of some presence, though I had not seen or heard anything. I looked at the cross-roads and saw a pair of dancing feet following a dancing flute but the next moment it seemed to me that the flute was following those dancing feet!

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CHARIOT

Next day, when we stepped out in the starlit dawn, heaven and earth were enveloped in peace. The weather was perfect and there was no remnant of the storm of the day before. We kept walking in a hurry as if in answer to some urgent summons. Suddenly, on a peak in front of us, silhouetted against a silky, purple-blue sky, there appeared a golden crest. We stopped. And then as peaks after peaks, dressed in radiant robes, ushered in the golden chariot, Mir, who was as stupefied as I was by this flashing sunrise, continued the story.

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As I see the arrival of the sun's chariot, my mind goes back to Ar, the warrior-prince who always did the right thing, always did his duty, but there was no burden of duty upon him. One day, when I asked him how he could be so carefree, he told me that he had attained it after a long struggle. Then looking at my inquisitive face, he told me the whole story.

Reluctantly looking away from the rising sun, I turned to the warrior's struggle.

Ar was once required to vanquish a cousin who had usurped his land and was oppressing his people. It was his duty to fight and to restore peace and order. But loved companions, comrades, kinsmen and teachers were on both sides. This crushed his heart with anguish.

And I suddenly realized that man is faced with a dilemma every moment of his life — to have or not to have, to do or not do, to be or not to be! If every moment he has to make a choice, does it not presuppose freedom? The chords whispered: And does it not imply that freedom has to be something more than an illusion?

And so, on the battlefield, he refused to fight and told his friend who was driving his chariot, that he did not desire anything and that he would be happier if the enemies struck him down, unresisting and unarmed.

And I saw a battlefield full of chains. My attention was

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particularly drawn by a red chain which looked as if it was peeping through something, a white chain which seemed to be very light as though it was made of dewdrops, a dark chain entangled and enmeshed that looked like a human heart, a dim, almost invisible chain near me that seemed to enfold the entire battlefield! And then, as I wondered if chains constituted the essence of life, the chords interrupted: Does it not depend on how you look at it? Is not the creator also enchained in and by his creation?

On hearing his lament, his friend, who now became his teacher told him:

Thou mournest for them thou shouldst not mourn,
And utterest vain words of wisdom.
The wise mourn neither for the living nor for the dead.
For never was I not, nor thou nor these kings;
Nor will any of us cease to be hereafter.

Mir seemed to enjoy this very much. And I wondered whether more courage was needed in dying or in living — in being born anew.

And then he added:

This is never born nor ever dies,
Nor having been will ever not be any more;
Unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient,
This is not slain when the body is slain...

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This no weapons wound, this no fire burns;
This no waters wet, this no wind doth dry...

Won, the teacher then told him that even if he thought that this is constantly born and dying, he should not grieve, for, certain is the death of the born and equally certain is the birth of the dead. Ultimately, Won, with the knowledge imparted by the teacher, Ar was transformed and took up the responsibility of doing his duty — of fighting.

The battlefield now disappeared and so did the battle. All that I could see was the faint outline of a magnificent chariot. And as I wondered whether the lone indweller was Ar or his teacher, the chords with an unusual gentleness were asking: What is 'this'?

When he finished the story, I looked at Ar's face, which was free from any conflict. I had noticed that while working, he put his entire heart and soul in it, as if he was worshipping. And yes, Won, he did not worry about the consequences — did not worry at all! Won, what is this miraculous 'this'?

I was not surprised to note, Fren, that Mir was asking the question which the chords had just asked!

Little Nach in the group also had once pestered the god of death to know 'this'.

God of death? Though Mir had laughed as he said this, I

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could not. Why are we ever in search of purposes, ideals, gods? Is it only to do away with the despair of life? To believe in something? To fall back on something? To give meaning to our lives? And then as I thought of a god of life, the chords asked gravely: What has the god of death to do with 'this'?

The god of death, instead, offered him many gifts. Nach, however, could not be bribed by the god's gifts. Ultimately, convinced of his sincerity and his competence to receive knowledge, the god of death told him the secret story. It was about a chariot with several horses and a rein and a driver who held the horses in check and a master riding inside. I enjoyed the story, though it confounded me, Won!

I was intrigued by the idea that one had to be competent in order to receive knowledge. Gather wisdom. Listen to stories. And then I thought of the wonders stories can accomplish. Would not our lives be dull without their entertaining influence, nourishing value and enriching power? I expected the chords to say something but they maintained a stony silence!

Seeing that I was confused, Shve brought a seed and asked me to break it into smaller parts and examine them till I could no more see anything. Then he told me that if I could understand that the tree was in the seed, I could understand 'this'. Isn't that obvious, Won? The tree is in the seed, the tree is the seed. Or, let's say, the seed is in the tree, the seed is the tree. Shve then asked me if I under-

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stood that different objects made of clay, like the pot and the lamp and the brick, are only different names and forms, and that clay was the real substance in them all. And that different ornaments made of gold like the necklace and the bracelet and the ring are only different names and forms and that gold was the real substance in them all. Again —

While I was getting impatient, the chords asked: Does it matter that the seed cannot give the shade which the tree can and the clay cannot give the light which the lamp can?

— when a lump of salt is dissolved in water, salt is present in every part of water. Won, saying this he just disappeared!

And then while I wondered if clay, gold, etc. are also only different names and forms, the chords asked: What is the real substance in them all?

Though I enjoyed the stories, I kept wondering why Shve had gone on and on with them. His friend told me that it was with the help of these stories that Shve's father had given him knowledge of that, knowing which everything else is known. Won, don't you have to know each thing separately? How can there be miraculous knowledge?

I laughed. Was Mir doubting miracles? Or, was he testing me? So often I could not make out even now how much he

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knew, could not decide whether a thought was his or of his men!

That brings me to Shan, the wise. One day, Won, when I narrated to him what Shve had said, he smiled and pointing to the mountain in front of us he said, "You may look at this from different points and different positions. It may look different from different angles. But it is the same mountain." Won, is it not clear right before your eyes? So, I was quite surprised when I heard that people were not prepared to accept what Shan said. Once, attempts were made to poison him; on another occasion, he was on the point of being offered as human sacrifice. And every time he was miraculously saved.

Mir's acceptance once again of miracles did not surprise me. But I was exasperated by this persistent resistance to and fear of truth — fear of that which is obvious, that which is simple!

Early in life, Won, he had mastered all knowledge and had surpassed all the learned men of his time declaring: All is reality! You are the ultimate reality!

A sudden silence followed the simple, self-evident statement and I heard, as from a great distance, a familiar but forgotten tune and experienced peace and happiness.

All our suffering, Shan said, was due to the failure to realize this, was due to ignorance — our great enemy.

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And it seemed to me that there was one evil, Fren, only one evil and that was ignorance. And there was one good, Fren, only one good and that was knowledge!

Again and again he insisted: Behold but one in all things! That thou art!

Next moment, while, aloud I repeated 'that thou art' and silently thought of 'this', Mir laughed and in that laughter was lost a voice that seemed to explain both 'this' and 'that'!

So, casting off the veil of ignorance, we must try to understand everything. Shan, therefore, spent all his time trying to spread knowledge as if that was his mission, his life, his god.

The morning was brilliant. But, where was the chariot now? I could see nothing except those dazzling peaks — irrefutable proof that the golden chariot did arrive and I had seen it. And then as I saluted them, I felt, Fren, that the chariot was not different from these sun-gilded tops and that it was now about to take some new name and form in my experience.

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Part III

VICI

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VICI

(1)

The next few days were days of confusion. With painful longing and a sense of loss, I combed every nook and corner in search of Mir. But in vain. I wondered if he had fallen into a gushing waterfall or was swept away by a frightening avalanche or had just vanished into thin air! The man who was intoxicated with miracles, had disappeared miraculously, leaving me all by myself. Yet, I had a strange feeling that I did not really know what I had lost. I was reminded of the wandering madman who had found on the seashore the touchstone he had been seeking laboriously and for long and which had transformed his iron chain into gold; but, not knowing what he had found or what had happened, had flung it into the fathomless ocean — had lost it. What had I lost — or found?

(2)

It was my last day in the valley. At dawn, as I stood at the

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doorstep of my cottage, surrounded by the Miracle Mountains, it looked like a sanctuary. Enveloped by the music of some invisible bells, I kept thinking of Mir, our last meeting, the last story and all the stories. Where was he? Who was he? Did I really meet him? I was reminded of the philosopher who dreamt that he was a butterfly and then wondered whether he was a philosopher dreaming that he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming that it was a philosopher!

(3)

I came out and as I started moving away from the mountains, I felt that the peaks were staring at me with a thousand eyes. I looked up. There they were — Cop and Shan, Jag and Soc, Tag and Shak — all of them and many more! They were all moving. And so were the mountain-peaks. And then as I looked more closely, I was astounded to find that in fact they were the peaks — crystalline peaks so clear that I saw in each of them my own reflection, and it looked like Mir!!

(4)

I stopped. Those thousand eyes were transformed into a thousand lips whispering, "Heaven need not remain a dream to be realized after reaching the grave. It is yours — here and now. Come up any way you like."

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I looked up. I thought of the miracle of climbing mountains. A movement from mere point to point and moment to moment that can lead to the top!

In the tone and manner of confiding a great secret, they continued, "As you climb, you see in front of you, regions after regions of great beauty and charm. You reach the top of one and you find that it is only the bottom and the beginning of the next. There is no end."

I thought of the ascent. If it is endless, even the unflinching efforts of a whole life-time will not lead to the top. The top will always be eluding — will forever remain unreachable.

As if they understood my thoughts, they whispered, "This is like a magic chest which no amount of force can open. But you have the key. You alone can open it, if you will."

I stared at those peaks as if with another mode of vision and realized that they were beyond all physical dimensions. It was clear that with these soaring peaks keeping the Miracle Mountains evergrowing, evergreen and everlasting, there could not be an illusion of ever-evading top.

"Come", they repeated very softly. As they invited and bent for a moment, the peaks from all sides converged; now there was no top, nor bottom; no beginning, nor end. And I felt I was there.

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(5)

And I heard myself shouting with unbounded joy: ATLANTIS! ATLANTIS! And the whole world resounded: A-T-L-A-N-T-I-S! A-T-L-A-N-T-I-S! As if saying: This is it! This is it!

ATLANTIS! The state of perfection men have been seeking for thousands of years! Eternal abode of supreme bliss reached by heroic spirits that find the secret of life.

The mountains still reverberated A-T-L-A-N-T-I-S! A-T-L-A-N-T-I-S! And the galaxy of those soaring peaks seemed to say: That am I! That am I!

ATLANTIS! A world imparadised by men who endeavour to understand, to know, to achieve, to explore, to create, to excel — to realize their highest potential, their own selves!

The peaks echoed and re-echoed: A-T-L-A-N-T-I-S! A-T-L-A-N-T-I-S! As if shaking and stirring and addressing the depths of my being: That thou art! That thou art!

(6)

I looked at those silvery peaks and those vast ranges. Who says ATLANTIS is a myth? Or that it is covered or concealed or lost? It is concealed only if you bring a veil in front of your eyes;

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if you refuse to see. If you open your eyes and see, it exists. It is real. It is.

(7)

Was not ATLANTIS the world's greatest mystery, a mystery which had puzzled mankind for thousands of years, a mystery destined to remain — it was thought — a mystery for ever?

Yes. But where is the mystery now? There is only a story — one more. Your story, Won!

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